

## Practical Family Problems

A *problem* is a situation in which something must be solved or worked out, and that involves selecting from many possible solutions. Families face a variety of problems. Learning how to solve problems collaboratively is part of developing a strong family.



There are different kinds of problems. . .

*Scientific problems* involve specific knowledge and “how to” questions. Solving scientific problems involves learning cause and effect or functional relationships among varying phenomena, such as concepts, principles, and procedures.

*Practical problems* are different from scientific problems. Solving practical problems involves deciding what to believe and do, especially about value questions. These types of problems require both value knowledge and factual, scientific knowledge when deciding what is best to do. Practical problems typically affect people and their well-being.

*Practical family problems* require deciding what should or ought to be done for family and family members’ best interests. Some examples of practical problems that families face are as follows:

- How should we deal with family conflict?
- How should we balance work time with family time?
- What should we do about fulfilling family responsibilities?

These types of problems that families face have several distinct characteristics that make them different from scientific problems. Practical family problems

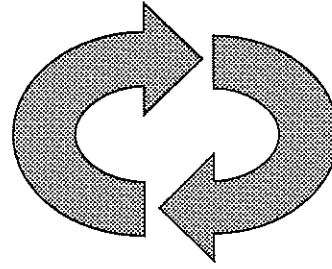
- Require deciding what should or ought to be done
- Involve conflicting values
- Are complicated and thus messy to solve
- Frequently have no one right solution
- Have consequences for self, family members, and often for others outside the family
- Are action problems
- Involve the thoughts, feelings, values, and needs of all family members
- Are dependent on the context or situation in which the problem occurs
- Are ill-structured: can be unclear in terms of the information needed to solve the problem



Write three practical family problems that your family or a family you know has faced recently.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Comparing Reasoning and Nonreasoning



### Nonreasoning approaches might include

- (1) Acting on impulse
- (2) Blindly accepting a solution
- (3) Making a choice based on habit or tradition
- (4) Choosing a solution because it is what everyone else is doing

### A nonreasoning approach is being used when

- A choice is made without thinking.
- Situational and environmental factors, alternatives, and consequences are not considered.
- Information is not actively sought.
- Values are not questioned or examined; facts are not used.
- Others' decisions are not questioned.
- Results may be harmful to self and others.
- The results may or may not promote the well-being of self and others.
- The decision is usually not workable for the long-term consequences of the situation.

### A reasoning approach includes

- (1) Comparing alternatives and their consequences
- (2) Evaluating alternatives, using criteria
- (3) Reflecting on long-term effects on all those involved
- (4) Justifying choices with good reasons and criteria

Reasoning may be prudential—based on what is best for self, or moral—based on what is best for self and others.

### A reasoning approach is being used when

- A choice is made considering context, alternatives, consequences, and ethical implications.
- Situational and environmental factors, alternatives, and consequences are considered.
- Accurate, relevant, and reliable information is sought and evaluated.
- Values are examined and supported by facts.
- A reasoned choice is made.
- The results are satisfactory for the decision maker and others.\*
- The results promote the well-being of self and others.\*
- The decision is workable for the long-term consequences of the situation for self and others.\*

\*Characteristics of ethical reasoning.

## REASON Through Practical Family Problems

In order to reason through practical family problems and find the solution that is in the best interest of all family members, it is important to consider many aspects of the problem, the situation, the possible solutions, and the consequences of each choice. The **REASON** model can be a guide for thinking through complex practical family problems. The components do not need to be used in the order given, but each component is important to the reasoning process.

<b>Recognize the Problem:</b>	<p>Practical family problems can be very complex, and sometimes just identifying the problem itself can be a real challenge. Each practical family problem has a unique context, and the context of the problem can influence the solution. At this point, it is important to consider what family members really want to happen when the problem is resolved; in other words, to determine the "desired ends."</p>	<p><i>What is the problem?</i>  <i>Why is it important to address the problem?</i>  <i>What is the context of the problem?</i>  <i>What caused the problem?</i>  <i>Who is involved?</i>  <i>What factors about this problem will affect the decision about what to do?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What resources are available?</i></li> <li>• <i>What situational factors affect the situation?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>What goals do we have for the solution to the problem?</i>  <i>What are the desired ends we want to achieve?</i></p>
<b>Evaluate Information Needed to Solve the Problem:</b>	<p>Solving practical problems requires both factual and value information. Factual information includes the concepts and knowledge that will help in developing and evaluating choices. Value information includes personal values, the values of others involved, and values that will help family members make an ethical choice. Values are used as criteria to decide what to believe and do.</p>	<p><i>What factual information is needed?</i>  <i>Where can we obtain this factual information?</i>  <i>What are our personal values regarding this problem situation? Which of these values are most important?</i>  <i>What are the values of others involved in this situation?</i>  <i>How will those values influence our decision about what to do?</i>  <i>What values will we use as criteria to decide which choice is best?</i></p>
<b>Analyze Choices and Consequences:</b>	<p>There is always more than one choice involved in a practical family problem. Sometimes there may be many choices. Even doing nothing about a problem is a choice. Each choice carries with it possible consequences—consequences for self, family members, and others outside the family, as well as both short-term and long-term consequences.</p>	<p><i>What choices are possible?</i>  <i>What are the short-term and long-term consequences of each choice?</i>  <i>What are the consequences for each family member? For those outside the family?</i></p>
<b>Select the Best Choice:</b>	<p>Making a decision about which alternative is best means evaluating each alternative against the value information and desired ends.</p>	<p><i>Which choice best reflects the values we have and the ends we desire regarding this problem?</i>  <i>Which choice would result in the most positive consequences for our family and for others?</i>  <i>Which choice works best for this particular situation?</i></p>
<b>Outline and Implement a Plan for Action:</b>	<p>Problems are not solved until a reasoned decision is put into action. Action requires careful planning.</p>	<p><i>What skills do we need to carry out this choice?</i>  <i>What resources do we need to carry out this choice?</i>  <i>What barriers exist that might prevent us from taking action? How can we overcome these barriers?</i>  <i>How can we organize the various tasks needed to achieve this solution?</i></p>
<b>Note the Results of Your Action(s):</b>	<p>Evaluating the outcome of a choice will help determine the success of the solution and what was learned from solving the problem.</p>	<p><i>Would we make the same choice again? Why or why not?</i>  <i>What have we learned?</i>  <i>How will this problem-solving experience affect our problem solving in the future?</i>  <i>Did our actions enhance the well-being of all family members and others outside the family?</i>  <i>Were our actions ethical?</i></p>

## Practical Family Problems Think Sheet

One way to make sure family members are reasoning carefully through problems is to use the steps of the REASON model. Complete the checklist below as you solve practical family problems.

\_\_\_\_ **R**ecognize the Problem. State the problem to be solved.

\_\_\_\_ **E**valuate Information Needed to Solve the Problem.

Family Goals and Values	Factual Information	Factors Affecting the Situation

\_\_\_\_ **A**nalyze Choices and Consequences

Choice	Consequences for Family Members and Others	How Choice Does or Does Not Reflect Criteria for Solving the Problem

\_\_\_\_ **S**elect the Best Choice. Provide good reasons for your choice. Explain how the solution reflects the criteria below.

- Relevant to the problem
- Ethical (positive long-term effects on all involved)
- Workable for this situation
- Based on relevant, reliable factual information

\_\_\_\_ **O**utline and Implement a Plan for Action. Identify the actions you need to take, when they will be done, and who will do them.

\_\_\_\_ **N**ote the Results of Your Actions. After you have taken action, reflect on whether or not your choice was best. Identify things you learned from solving this problem.

## Generating Choices and Consequences

### Key Points to Consider

Practical problems have many possible solutions. These possible solutions are called choices or alternatives. When you are making a decision, it is good to consider as many choices as possible, including the alternative of doing nothing about the problem.

Each possible alternative, if selected would result in consequences. Imagining what will happen if you act on possible choices can help you predict whether or not that choice is best. The consequences you imagine may or may not actually happen, but imagining consequences will help you select the best choice.

Since practical problems affect not only you, but others around you, it is important to consider the consequences of alternatives for yourself and others. In addition, the short-term consequences (those that might happen immediately following your choice) and the long-term consequences (those that might happen a month, a year, or a number of years after your choice) may be different. You should consider both short-term and long-term consequences for each alternative to make the best choice.

### Questions for Discussion

- How many choices are usually available for solving practical problems?
- What are the advantages of considering many different choices when solving practical problems?
- Why is it important to consider the consequences of each choice?
- How will these consequences affect your decision about which choice is best?
- Why is it important to consider the consequences for others when making choices about practical problems?

### Enrichment Activities

1. Choose five family relations problems and write each at the top of a large sheet of newsprint. In five groups, choose one of the problems and list at least three possible choices to that problem on the newsprint. Trade sheets with that of another group, read the possible choices on the page and list possible short-term consequences of each choice. Trade sheets again and add long-term consequences for each choice. Retain your original paper and put a "+" beside those consequences you believe to be positive and a "-" beside those consequences you believe are negative.
2. Choose a practical family problem and make a choices-and-consequences chart for that problem. Place possible choices in one column and short-term consequences, long-term consequences, and consequences for others, in remaining columns. In pairs, trade papers and add consequences to your partner's paper as needed.

## Using Factual Information When Reasoning

### Key Points to Consider

Solving practical family problems requires both value information and factual information. Using factual information when solving practical problems can help families make choices that are best for all family members and others. As families reason through problems, two questions can help with regard to factual information:

- *Do we have enough relevant factual information to solve this problem?*
- *Is the information we have reliable?*

There are many sources of information for solving problems. As families solve practical problems, they may seek information from these sources:

**Advice from Others:** friends, other family members, teachers, experts

**Media Sources:** television, radio, videotapes

**Publications:** newspapers, magazines

**Government or community agencies:** mental health organizations, support groups, hospital wellness programs

**Personal observation or experience**

Seeking information requires the ability to evaluate whether the information is reliable and relevant to the practical problem situation. When seeking information, family members need good listening skills and the ability to question others to determine value perspectives behind information. When seeking advice from others, it is important to consider their values, how those values influence the advice given, and how those values compare with those of the family solving the problem.

The quality of factual information may vary from helpful to misleading, depending on the source. How do you know when information is reliable? The questions below can help you evaluate sources of information.

- (1) Does the author or source of information have appropriate credentials?
- (2) Does the author or source of information reflect a bias? If so, what are the consequences of this bias?
- (3) Is the information up-to-date?
- (4) Is the information presented in a logical way and supported by reputable and extensive research?

### Questions for Discussion

- What are the consequences of solving practical family problems without adequate information?
- What are the consequences of solving practical family problems with unreliable information?
- Why is factual information important to practical problem solving?

### Enrichment Activities

1. Choose a practical family problem and list all possible sources of information for solving that problem.
2. Create a display of sources of information for solving practical family problems. Evaluate the various sources for reliability. Share your evaluations with the class. Justify your choices.
3. Create a poster illustrating questions to use when evaluating sources of information. Display in the classroom.

## Using Value Information When Reasoning

### Key Points to Consider

A value is a principle or quality that is valuable or desirable. Solving practical family problems requires the consideration of value information as well as factual information. Practical problems often involve conflicting values. Some value perspectives that can conflict are

- (1) Values concerning self-interest vs. values that are in the interest of the family good
- (2) Values concerning self or family interest vs. values that are in the interest of the public good
- (3) Values that foster competition vs. values that foster cooperation
- (4) Values that foster interdependence or independence vs. values that foster dependence
- (5) Values that reflect individualism vs. values that reflect a commitment to the family group

Being aware of values and considering the values of others can help families make better decisions about practical problems. Each time families make a decision regarding a practical problem, certain types of values are represented in that decision. In the list below, types of values are described.

### Types of Values

**Aesthetic** values reflect a concern for appearance and beauty.

**Economic** values involve cost control, efficiency, and management.

**Health and safety** values deal with physical well-being.

**Environmental** values reflect a concern for the state of the environment.

**Intellectual** values are concerned with education, reasoning, and logic.

**Religious** values reflect a concern for following religious doctrine.

**Prudential** values reflect a concern for one's own interest.

**Moral** values involve others' well-being.

### Questions for Discussion

- Why is value information important when making decisions about family relations problems?
- What types of values are most likely to influence your decisions about practical problems? Why?

### Enrichment Activities

1. For each type of value, give an example of action taken related to family relations that is based on that value.
2. Design a bulletin board entitled, "Families' Values in Action." Collect newspaper and magazine articles or create case studies that illustrate how families' values influence behavior. Throughout the course, take turns adding articles or case studies and explain how the values affect family behavior, how values may have changed or been reexamined over time, and how value choices can represent conflicting perspectives.
3. Observe the actions of family members you know for examples of different types of values guiding their actions. Try to identify the specific values that seem to guide their behaviors. Share examples with the class.

## Making Ethical Decisions

### Key Points to Consider

The word *ethics* is defined as the moral principles or values governing an individual or group. Many professions such as law and medicine have codes of ethics. The principles set forth in these codes of ethics help professionals make choices that will be best for everyone involved.

Since the choices families make about practical problems involve more than one person, it is important that families consider what is ethical when deciding which choice is best. For instance, a parent who is deciding whether or not to take a job offer in another city might not only consider the impact of his choice on his own career, but might also consider the impact on his children, spouse, and other family members. Considering the impact of his decision on others will help him make a more ethical decision.

Universal values are those values that transcend culture, time, and religions to establish standards for ethical conduct. These values form the basis of many of our laws and regulations as a society. Examples of universal values are given below. These values can be used as guidelines for making ethical choices.

**Honesty:** Honest people are truthful and sincere.

**Integrity:** People with integrity behave in a manner that is consistent with ethical beliefs.

**Trustworthiness:** People worthy of trust keep promises and fulfill commitments.

**Loyalty:** Loyal people provide support and commitment to others.

**Fairness:** Fair people are committed to justice, the equal treatment of individuals, and respect for diversity.

**Caring:** A caring person shows concern for the well-being of self, others, and the environment.

**Respect:** Respectful people have confidence in their beliefs and values and acknowledge, understand, and support the rights of others to express their beliefs.

**Responsibility:** A responsible person contributes to the family, his or her workplace, and community (local/global) in positive ways and encourages the participation of others.

**Pursuit of Excellence:** In the pursuit of excellence, people take pride in their work, give their best efforts, reflect on the results of their work, and apply knowledge gained to subsequent tasks.

**Accountability:** A quality in individuals whereby each knows, understands, considers, and accepts the impact and consequences of personal actions and decisions.

When deciding whether or not a decision is ethical, the following questions can be used for reflection:

1. Does this choice have positive long-term consequences for you and others?
2. Would you be willing to change places with the person or people most affected by the choice?
3. Would this be the best thing to do in a similar situation?
4. Would there be positive results if everyone did things this way?
5. Will this choice contribute to the physical and psychological well-being of you? Your family? Your group?



**Making Ethical Decisions** *(continued)*

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**Questions for Discussion**

- Why is it important to think about whether or not our decisions are ethical in families?
- Why is it important to be aware of universal values?
- How do actions your family has taken recently reflect universal values?
- Why should your family be concerned about making ethical choices with regard to practical family problems?
- Is it difficult to make ethical choices? Why or why not?
- Can there be more than one ethical solution to a given problem? Why or why not?

**Enrichment Activities**

1. Make a poster illustrating the Universal Values and display it in class.
2. Collect newspaper or magazine articles about family actions that reflect each of the universal values. Incorporate these into the poster you made in the above activity.
3. Collect newspaper or magazine articles about actions that you would consider to be unethical. Justify your decision.
4. Obtain a copy of codes of ethics from various professions. Obtain copies of your school behavior guidelines or code of conduct. Compare these guidelines and determine how each represents the universal values.
5. Divide into two groups. Have the first group write a code of ethics for teachers. Have the second group write a code of ethics for students. Compare your codes of ethics and explain how these codes reflect ethical values.
6. Write a code of ethics for families.



## Providing Good Reasons for Choices


### Key Points to Consider

Perhaps the most difficult part of solving practical family problems is deciding which choice is best. Reasoning well means that families will be able to provide good reasons for their choice. What is a "good" reason when it comes to justifying a solution to a practical family problem? A "good" reason is

- relevant to the problem
- supported by relevant, reliable factual information
- ethically defensible

Being able to provide good reasons to support solutions to practical family problems shows that families have considered potential consequences, family goals and values, ethical criteria, and adequate, reliable information.

Reasoning errors can divert attention from the real issue and result in reasons that don't support the answer to the question or issue. Examples of reasoning errors are

- Using a word or phrase in two different ways, resulting in unclear meanings
  - Appealing to a questionable authority without examining evidence authorities are using
  - Attacking a person or a person's background
  - Name calling
  - Using popularity arguments such as "Everyone . . ."
  - Presenting a faulty dilemma
  - Providing only one or two choices: Either-or errors
  - Using generalities
  - Oversimplifying
  - Diverting attention from the real issue
  - Confusing "What should be" with "What is"
  - Confusing naming with explaining
  - Reflecting searching for perfect solutions
  - Begging the question
  - Appealing only to emotion
  - Using emotional fallacies such as the bandwagon appeal, flattery, or false analogies
  - Using deceptive statistics
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### Questions for Discussion

- Is it possible to use reasoning and still make a poor decision? Why or why not?
- Why is it important to provide good reasons for solutions to practical family problems?
- What conditions contribute to errors in reasoning?

### Enrichment Activities

1. In small groups, choose a practical family problem, identify several choices for solving that problem, and complete **Which Choice is Best?** (p. 36). Share your reasons for the solution with the class and explain why those are good reasons for your choice.
2. Observe a television situation comedy about a family. Identify a practical family problem faced in the program and the solution selected by the family. Write the reasons they have used to select that choice and explain whether or not you believe their reasons to be good reasons.

## Which Choice is Best?

When families solve problems, they make choices among alternatives about what should be done. How do they know which alternative is best for all family members? In the space below, write alternatives that could be used to solve a practical family problem. Then use the following chart to test which alternative might be best in that situation.

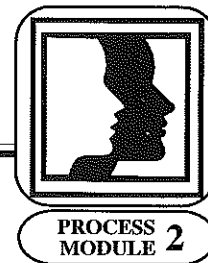
<b>Alternative A:</b>	<b>Alternative B:</b>				<b>Alternative C:</b>			
<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>Alternative A</b>		<b>Alternative B</b>		<b>Alternative C</b>		<b>Justification of Response</b>	
A. Does this choice reflect the criteria you have established for solving this problem? Desired ends? Values of self and others?	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO		
B. Is this choice based on adequate, reliable information?								
C. Is this choice workable for the situation?								
D. Is this choice ethical?								
1. Does this choice have positive long-term consequences for family members and others?								
2. Would family members be willing to change places with the person or people most affected by the choice?								
3. Would this be the best choice to do in a similar situation?								
4. Would there be good results if all families did things this way?								
5. Will this choice contribute to the overall well-being of all family members? The community? Society?								

Select an alternative and list three reasons why that alternative would be the best choice.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

# Solving Personal and Family Problems

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## Assessment

### Paper and Pencil

1. Given case studies, clarify personal and family issues by stating the problem to be solved, identifying the type of problem, and describing at least two factors affecting the problem.
2. Given case studies, create at least three alternatives for solving each problem.
3. Given choices to a problem situation, evaluate potential consequences of each alternative choice by listing at least two positive and two negative consequences of each choice.
4. Given case studies, use criteria and standards to make ethical decisions. Test the decision by applying questions used to determine whether a solution is ethical.
5. Given a solution to a problem situation, evaluate the outcomes of the solution by identifying short-term and long-term consequences of the action taken and determining if the problem was solved.
6. Given a practical problem-solving worksheet and a sample practical problem, use each component of the practical problem-solving process to reach a justifiable solution.

### Classroom Experiences

1. In cooperative learning groups, choose a specific skill related to solving practical problems. Research that skill and present your findings to the class, defining terms and explaining how that particular skill is important to solving practical problems.
2. In small groups, choose a practical problem and use the practical problem-solving process to resolve that problem. Present your solution to the class and justify your decision.
3. Choose an article related to a family relations problem and report on the article in your journal. Focus on how the practical problem-solving process should be used to solve the problem identified in the article.

### Application to Real-life Settings

1. Keep a journal about how you solve family relations practical problems. For each problem you solve, write a statement of the problem, choices considered, consequences considered, the solution selected, and justification. Record the actual outcome of the solution to each problem. Evaluate whether or not your solutions were best for you and others.